

News Release



California Arts Council

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Students Speak Out in California “Poetry Out Loud” Recitation Content

*Third Year for California’s Participation in National Recitation
Competition that Improves Language Skills, Fun for Students*

SACRAMENTO – Thousands of students in 22 California counties are gearing up to participate in “Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest,” a competition that engages high-school students in the presentation of poetry through memorization and performance. Competitions are held in classrooms, with winners then competing on the county or regional level, then to the California state championships, and finally the national contest held in Washington, DC. Interested teachers, administrators, parents and students are encouraged to contact the California Arts Council to find out how their school can participate.

“It is our third year for the successful Poetry Out Loud program in California,” said Muriel Johnson, Director of the California Arts Council, the lead agency for the program in California.

“Young people interested in rap and slam contests can be surprisingly interested in classical poetry when it’s presented through the Poetry Out Loud competition. The program encourages high school students to study and recite some of the richest language every written. We’ve seen students from all backgrounds and academic levels embrace this program wholeheartedly. It can change their lives.”

The Poetry Out Loud program provides for professional poets to work with teachers in the classroom through the arts nonprofit California Poets in the Schools. Nationally approved educational materials and teachers guides are free. Students may review hundreds of poems and

The mission of the California Arts Council, a state agency, is to advance California through the Arts and Creativity. Members of the California Arts Council include: Chair Michael Alexander, Vice Chair Malissa Feruzzi Shriver, Annette Bening, Eunice David, Charmaine Jefferson, Chong-Moon Lee, Carlos Martinez, Michael Rubel, Fred Sands, Karen Skelton and William Turner.

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Poetry Out Loud in California 2007-08

related information through the program website at www.poetryoutloud.org. Winners are eligible to receive scholarships, and schools get financial assistance for books and related materials. The California state championships will be held on March 14, 2008, and the national contest in April.

Experts see significant benefits from Poetry Out Loud. “The process of memorizing and sounding a poem is identical to learning to play a piece of music by heart,” said Al Young, California State Poet Laureate. “A student or anyone else who takes the time to commit a particular poem to memory learns much about that particular voice and the nuances of poetry in general.”

Teachers find the competition to be exciting for kids and helpful in the classroom. “I have been teaching English for 16 years and it is so hard to even get kids interested in poetry,” said Kathy Harding from Galt High School. “So when I saw Poetry Out Loud come along, I thought of how much it would help my work.”

The initiative from the National Endowment for the Arts brings literary arts to students, a critical need in U.S. schools. The Poetry out Loud program seeks to foster the next generation of literary readers by capitalizing on the latest trends in poetry: recitation and performance. Counties already slated to participate include Contra Costa, Fresno, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Los Angeles, Madera, Marin, Mendocino, Monterey, Nevada, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Siskiyou, Sonoma, Tuolumne, and Ventura.

Individuals interested in having their schools participate in California’s Poetry Out Loud may contact Kristin Margolis at 916-322-6391 or kmargolis@caartscouncil.com. Members of the press interested in information on California’s Poetry Out Loud program can contact Mary Beth Barber at (916) 322-6588 or mbarber@caartscouncil.com. General information can be found at www.cac.ca.gov and www.poetryoutloud.org.